

## Building Coherent Paragraphs I

To make sure your writing is coherent, check to see whether the sentences in each paragraph hang together logically. One logical way to organize your writing is by **chronological order**—that is, by presenting events in the order in which they occur. For example, if you're explaining how to bake a cake, your readers will want to follow along step by step. They don't want to get to the end of your recipe and read, "By the way, when you added the eggs earlier, you should have separated them first." Look at the following paragraph.

When choosing a watermelon, remember these three steps. Check **first** to see whether the watermelon is firm, symmetrical, and free of dents and bruises. **Once** you've found a watermelon that looks good, pick it up to see if it feels heavy for its size. It should: a fresh, juicy watermelon is mostly water, which is heavy. **The last step** is to turn the watermelon over to make sure that it has a yellowish spot underneath. The spot is where the watermelon lay ripening in the sun.

See how the transitions clarify the order suggested by the topic sentence, which begins the paragraph. Note too that not all sentences in a chronologically ordered paragraph need transitions. Some flow naturally from preceding sentences.

**EXERCISE** The sentences in the following paragraphs are in the wrong order. Number each set of sentences to put them in chronological order.

### Sample

- 3 Once they were cool, the baker decorated them with icing.
- 2 The baker then took the cookies out to let them cool.
- 1 The cookies in the baker's oven looked like they were ready.

### Paragraph 1

- \_\_\_\_\_ First, wash both the melon and the knife you'll be cutting with.
- \_\_\_\_\_ With a fork, scrape the seeds from each strip and from the flesh left on the rind.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Then cut the melon in half lengthwise and again in quarters.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To de-seed a honeydew melon with a minimum of fuss, follow these few simple steps.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Along the seed line of each quarter, cut off a strip of melon flesh and separate the strip from the rest of the melon.

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#### Paragraph 2

- \_\_\_\_\_ While the sugar mixture is cooling, purée 5 pounds of melon, seeded and cut into 1-inch cubes, and put the purée in a large bowl.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Finally, freeze the whisked mixture in the bowl and scoop out to serve.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To make melon ice, first combine  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of water and 1 cup of sugar in a medium saucepan and cook over high heat until the mixture boils.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Next, pour the cooled sugar mixture into the melon purée, add 2 tablespoons of lime juice, and whisk thoroughly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reduce the heat by half and stir until the sugar dissolves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When the sugar is entirely dissolved, remove the saucepan from the heat.

## Building Coherent Paragraphs II

To explain in a clear way why certain events occurred, organize your writing using **cause-and-effect order**. You might, for example, begin with one cause and then explain its several effects, or you might show how several causes led to a single effect. You may use a causal chain, as demonstrated in the paragraph below, to explain a more complex series of events, where one effect becomes the cause for another effect, and so on.

In 1746 James Lind, an English naval surgeon, noticed that on a ship with good water and provisions, 80 of 350 crew members developed scurvy—a disease whose symptoms include bleeding gums, anemia, and hemorrhaging. **To understand why this was happening**, Lind did an experiment. He divided twelve sick crew members into six groups. **By** preparing a different diet for each group, he found that those who were served lemons and oranges improved the most. Lind was **thus** convinced that eating citrus fruit was the best remedy. **In accordance with** Lind's findings, the British Admiralty eventually ordered lemon juice to be a part of naval rations. Scurvy virtually disappeared from the British fleet **as a result**.

Notice how the transitions, in bold, make clear how one idea leads to another. Also notice that transitions fit equally well at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

**EXERCISE** The sentences in the following paragraphs are in the wrong order. Number each set of sentences to put them in cause-and-effect order.

### Sample

- 3 Owing to the scientists' work, more recent research has now linked vitamins to the slowing of the aging process.
- 1 James Lind's experiments in the treatment of scurvy led to a theory of deficiency diseases.
- 2 From this theory, scientists early in the twentieth century were able to pinpoint vitamins as the key ingredients in preventing deficiency diseases.

### Paragraph 1

- \_\_\_\_\_ Because having an unpaired electron is unstable, a free radical either takes an electron from or gives an electron to a molecule in a nearby cell of the body.
- \_\_\_\_\_ As a result of the deterioration, a person's body becomes aged and diseased.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Free radicals, molecules that have one unpaired electron, regularly roam through a person's body.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The cells deteriorate in turn from this disruption of their molecules.

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**Paragraph 2**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Once in your blood or lymph system, the antioxidants render harmful free radicals in your body harmless.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To ward off age and disease, eat foods high in antioxidants, such as broccoli and carrots.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Moreover, because the cells are functioning properly, your body won't degenerate as quickly and you just might live longer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ By eating these foods, you allow the antioxidants to enter your bloodstream or lymph system through your intestines.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Since a smaller number of free radicals is left to attack your body's cells, the cells can continue to function properly.

## Building Coherent Paragraphs III

To describe rooms, vistas, objects, or scenes without confusing your reader, organize your paragraphs using spatial order. **Spatial order** makes clear where things are in relation to each other (and possibly to you, the writer). Using spatial order lets you not only connect ideas more clearly but also paint a picture with words, enabling readers to visualize the place you are describing. Study the paragraph below.

If you ever visit Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, be sure to notice the special architectural details. **From** the Entrance Hall, you will notice **on your immediate left** a large rectangular fireplace. On closer inspection, you'll notice that **on either side** of it is a panel door. **Opening** either of these doors reveals a dumbwaiter, a contraption used to carry wine **up from** the cellar **below**. **Directly across from** the fireplace are two sets of sliding pocket doors that could keep out the cold from the tearoom **next to** the dining room **to the north**.

Notice how the boldfaced prepositional phrases and other transitions help you to visualize the place being described.

**EXERCISE** The sentences in the following paragraphs are in the wrong order. Number each set of sentences to put them in spatial order.

### Sample

- 2   An old and cracked blender sat on the counter opposite me.
- 3   Next to it on the right was a toaster that looked like a refugee from the 1950s.
- 1   Upon entering the kitchen, I noticed two appliances on the counter.

### Paragraph 1

- \_\_\_\_\_ On the left, as you walk in, stands a whiter than white industrial-size refrigerator.
- \_\_\_\_\_ With all the cooking power built into that stove, it's a wonder nothing Molly's family prepares ever burns.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Between the refrigerator and a beautiful sink in the corner runs a clutterless countertop of gleaming stainless steel.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My friend Molly's kitchen looks like a magazine spread.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Across from the counter stands a bright red stove so imposing it looks like it could give a blast furnace competition.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The counter can be clutterless because everything from knives to mixers fits in specially made cabinets underneath.

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Continued**Paragraph 2**

- \_\_\_\_\_ From the parked car, we could see that the house got plenty of shade from two trees, but not so much as to make the house seem dreary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the real estate agent's car on the way to the house for sale, I could see that my parents were nervous with excitement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The agent fit the key in the lock, flung open the door, and waved us inside.
- \_\_\_\_\_ While we stood on the front porch, the agent fumbled for the keys and explained that the house had just gone on the market.
- \_\_\_\_\_ We pulled up to the curb directly in front of the house and sat there for a minute, staring at it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ As we walked from the car up the stone-paved path to the front entrance, I could hear my parents say to each other, "Do you like it? Do you like it?"